

**STATE OF TENNESSEE**

OFFICE OF THE  
ATTORNEY GENERAL  
PO BOX 20207  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37202

October 25, 2001

Opinion No. 01-160

Authority of city to refer to its court as a general sessions court

---

**QUESTION**

What authority exists for a municipality to refer to its court as a general sessions court? Put differently, under the law as it presently exists in Tennessee, may a general sessions court exist for any political subdivision other than a county?

**OPINION**

The term “General Sessions Court” cannot accurately refer to a city court.

**ANALYSIS**

This opinion asks whether a municipality is authorized to refer to its court as a general sessions court. City courts are typically created under the city charter or some other statute like Tenn. Code Ann. §§ 16-17-101, *et seq.*, authorizing a home rule municipality to create a city court. Some city courts exercise concurrent general sessions jurisdiction over criminal offenses committed within city limits. But this concurrent jurisdiction does not make a city court a general sessions court. General sessions courts are established in counties either by private act or under Tenn. Code Ann. §§ 16-15-101, *et seq.* The jurisdiction of a general sessions court is coextensive with the county. Tenn. Code Ann. § 16-15-501(a). A general sessions judge is a county officer. *State ex rel. Winstead v. Moody*, 596 S.W.2d 811 (Tenn. 1980). For these reasons, we think the term “General Sessions Court” cannot accurately refer to a city court, even if the city court exercises concurrent jurisdiction with a general sessions court over criminal offenses committed within city limits. *See also* Op.Tenn.Atty.Gen. 81-528 (September 22, 1981); Op.Tenn.Atty.Gen. 81-265 (April 24, 1981).

---

PAUL G. SUMMERS  
Attorney General and Reporter

---

MICHAEL E. MOORE  
Solicitor General

---

ANN LOUISE VIX  
Senior Counsel

Requested by:

Honorable David A. Doyle  
District Public Defender  
117 East Main Street  
Gallatin, TN 37066